



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

War of 1812 Revenue Cutters & Masters

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Active, New York (Master Caleb Brewster)

Cutter: *Active* was purchased and began operations as early as 1807. It remained in service until 1817.

Master: On January 20, 1797, Caleb Brewster received his commission as 1st mate for revenue cutters; and, on July 28, 1801, he received a commission as revenue cutter master for the State of New York. He retired from the service in 1816.

Commodore Barry, Eastport, Maine (Master Daniel Elliott)

Cutter: On March 20, 1812, *Commodore Barry* was purchased at Sag Harbor, N.Y., from Stephen Mitchell for \$4,100. Pierced for ten guns, *Commodore Barry* carried only six and the cutter displaced ninety-eight tons. Captured by the Royal Navy on August 3, 1812, British authorities auctioned off *Commodore Barry* in Saint John, New Brunswick, on July 4, 1815. The cutter had been in custody for 770 days, before re-selling for £730 and receiving the name *Brunswicker*.

Master: On April 13, 1812, Daniel Elliott received a commission as revenue cutter master in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. After the capture of *Commodore Barry*, Elliott continued to serve in the Maine region commanding the revenue "boat" *Income*.

Diligence, Wilmington, North Carolina (Master Joseph Burch)

Cutter: *Diligence* was built and commissioned in Wilmington in 1807, and stationed in Wilmington as well. This cutter was previously un-documented and was the fourth of six cutters named "Diligence." *Diligence* remained in service until 1831.

Master: Joseph Burch received his commission as a 1st mate for revenue cutters on March 7, 1797, and was commissioned a revenue cutter master in North Carolina on January 20, 1809. Burch served as master of *Diligence* throughout the War of 1812. Little is known about his postwar career.

***Eagle*, New Haven, Connecticut (Master Frederick Lee)**

Cutter: On January 16, 1809, the Treasury Department authorized the New Haven customs collector to purchase and man a cutter to serve out of New Haven. Built in Connecticut, *Eagle* was completed and commissioned for service by September 16, 1809. Records indicate that the foretopsail schooner measured approximately sixty feet in length and eighteen feet in beam and drew about ten feet. It carried four four-pound cannon, two two-pound cannon, and a crew of twenty-five. The British captured *Eagle* on October 14, 1814, and sailed the cutter as a prize to Halifax. On December 31, 1814, the New Haven customs collector paid \$3,900 to build a new cutter *Eagle*. In October 1815, the collector paid a \$900 balance for the new *Eagle*, which was finally completed on March 29, 1816.

Master: Frederick Lee received his commission as a master in the State of Connecticut on September 14, 1809, and he took command of *Eagle* two days later. Lee remained a revenue cutter master through 1829 and he commanded cutters named *Eagle* for most of that time.

***Gallatin*, Norfolk & Charleston (Masters Daniel McNeill, Edward Herbert and John Hubbard Silliman)**

Cutter: On December 5, 1807, revenue cutter master Daniel McNeill paid a balance of \$9,432.93 for *Gallatin* in Norfolk and sailed it down to Charleston for revenue cutter service. On March 31, 1813, *Gallatin's* magazine exploded and destroyed the cutter in Charleston Harbor.

Masters: Daniel McNeill received a master's commission for the State of South Carolina on December 5, 1807. He retained command of *Gallatin* until the cutter's transfer from Charleston to Norfolk in August of 1812. On July 7, 1812, Norfolk native and experienced merchant captain, Edward Herbert, was commissioned a master for revenue cutter duty. In August, he took command of cutter *Gallatin* in Norfolk, while McNeill remained behind in Charleston. On October 22, 1812, John Hubbard Silliman received his commission as a revenue cutter master in the State of South Carolina and took command of *Gallatin*, after it returned to its homeport of Charleston. [Note: During the early spring of 1814, Edward Herbert served as captain of the merchant schooner *Traveller*, and in April, the British captured the schooner down bound from Baltimore to Norfolk. Under a white flag, Norfolk locals negotiated for the Herbert's release and, on May 7, the Royal Navy paroled Herbert to Norfolk. On December 3, 1814, newspapers reported Herbert's death in Norfolk due to natural causes.]

***General Greene*, Wilmington, Delaware (Master Joseph Sawyer)**

Cutter: Construction of *General Greene* commenced in Philadelphia on November 6, 1810, and the cutter began operations by April 1811. It measured approximately sixty feet in length with a twenty-foot beam. It served throughout the war and was decommissioned and sold on October 13, 1815.

Master: Joseph Sawyer served off-and-on in Philadelphia-and Wilmington-based cutters from November 14, 1799, until August 30, 1808, when he was dismissed as master of *General Greene*. Sawyer was re-commissioned as master of the cutter on October 30, 1811, and remained in command until October 1815, when *General Greene* was decommissioned.

James Madison, Savannah (Master George Brooks)

Cutter: The Treasury Department authorized the Baltimore customs collector to build the cutter *James Madison* on June 26, 1807; and the cutter was completed in 1808. On January 18, 1809, *James Madison* sailed from Baltimore to take up station at Savannah, Georgia. Captured by the British on August 22, 1812, the cutter was surveyed by the Royal Navy on October 13, 1812; found unfit for British naval service; and sold to a private owner to serve as a yacht.

Master: On December 19, 1811, George Brooks received his commission as revenue cutter master and took command of cutter *James Madison*. Brooks had received a commission as 1st mate for *James Madison* on September 17, 1810. On August 22, 1812, the British frigate HMS *Barbadoes* captured the *James Madison*, taking Brooks and his crew as prisoners. On November 28, 1812, the British paroled Brooks at New York from the cartel brig *Diamond*. There is no record of him serving as a revenue cutter master thereafter.

Louisiana, New Orleans (Master Angus O. Frazer)

Cutter: On June 18, 1804, the Treasury Department authorized the Baltimore customs collector to build a cutter for the newly acquired port of New Orleans. During the summer and fall of 1804, *Louisiana* was built and it was completed by December of that year. *Louisiana* displaced about seventy-five tons; measured seventy feet in length; had a beam of twenty-two feet; and drew approximately six feet. The cutter set sail for New Orleans on December 16, 1804, and served out of New Orleans until August 19, 1812, when it was lost with all hands on board during a severe hurricane. The cutter was a total loss and sold, salvaged and refitted for merchant service.

Master: Angus O. Frazer received his commission as a master for revenue cutter service in Massachusetts on September 10, 1810, and began commanding *Louisiana* later in 1810. On November 25, 1812, Frazer (who was not on board the cutter during the deadly hurricane) was dismissed for “arbitrary action and unjust conduct” for insulting behavior toward a merchant captain.

Massachusetts, Boston (Masters John Foster Williams and Samuel Russell Trevett):

Cutter: *Massachusetts* was built in Boston and commissioned in 1801. It displaced approximately sixty-two tons; measured fifty-eight feet in length with a nearly eighteen-foot beam; and drew about ten feet. This cutter was the third to bear the name “Massachusetts” and served out of Boston throughout the War of 1812. It was

decommissioned and exchanged for the new cutter *Search* in Newport, Rhode Island, on July 23, 1816.

Masters: John Foster Williams became a master for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on December 4, 1791. On June 24, 1814, at seventy years of age, Williams died of natural causes while still in command of cutter *Massachusetts*. On July 18, 1814, Samuel Russell Trevett received his commission as revenue cutter master for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; and, on July 21, 1814, Trevett assumed command of cutter *Massachusetts*. He later commanded Boston cutters *Search* and *Hamilton* before his death in January 1832.

Mercury, New Bern, North Carolina (Master William H. Wallace)

Cutter: On April 6, 1807, the customs collector for North Carolina signed a contract to build *Mercury* in Ocracoke. On January 31, 1809, the Treasury Department moved the cutter's homeport from Ocracoke to New Bern. *Mercury* last appeared in the records in 1820 and little else is known about the cutter's size and rig.

Master: William H. Wallace served as 1st mate on cutter *Diligence* (Wilmington, North Carolina) beginning on April 25, 1791, and likely served as *Mercury*'s first master, beginning with its commissioning.

New Hampshire, Portsmouth, New Hampshire (Masters William Parker Adams and Nathaniel Kennard)

Cutter: On September 27, 1802, the Portsmouth, New Hampshire, customs collector executed a contract with a local shipbuilder to build the *New Hampshire* for the Portsmouth station. The cutter was decommissioned and sold in May of 1816 and little else is known about the cutter's size and rig.

Masters: William Parker Adams was commissioned a master for the State of New Hampshire on May 8, 1810, and took command of *New Hampshire* on May 31, 1810. On May 3, 1812, 1st Mate Nathaniel Kennard had resigned his commission as 1st mate of *New Hampshire* due to a disagreement with Adams. In September of 1812, the Portsmouth customs collector dismissed Adams as master; and, on October 30, 1812, the customs collector recommended Kennard to command the cutter. On November 5, Kennard received his commission as master of the cutter and, records indicate that he remained in command of *New Hampshire* until it was sold in 1816.

Surveyor, Baltimore (Master Samuel Travis)

Cutter: *Surveyor* was built in Baltimore by Robert Parsons and commissioned in September 1807. According to records, the cutter measured sixty-eight feet in length, had a beam of nineteen feet across and drew approximately six feet. The vessel carried a crew of twenty-five and an armament of six six-pound cannon. A large British boarding party captured *Surveyor* on June 12, 1815.

Master: On December 30, 1811, Samuel Travis received a commission as a revenue cutter master for the Commonwealth of Virginia and took command of the cutter *Surveyor*. On August 27, 1807, Travis had been commissioned a 1st mate for Virginia, and began serving after *Surveyor's* commissioning. In the evening of June 12, 1813, a large armed boarding party from the British frigate HMS *Narcissus* captured *Surveyor*, taking Travis and his crew as prisoners. On August 7, 1813, Travis returned to Norfolk, Virginia, after the Royal Navy paroled him at Washington, North Carolina. There is no record of him serving as a revenue cutter master thereafter.

Thomas Jefferson, Norfolk (Master William Ham)

Cutter: *Thomas Jefferson* was constructed and commissioned in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1802. The cutter served out of Savannah, Georgia, until 1809, when the new cutter *James Madison* began serving the Savannah station. From then on, *Thomas Jefferson* served out of Norfolk and was decommissioned and sold there in 1817. Little else is known about the cutter.

Master: William Ham received his commission as a 2nd mate of Norfolk-based cutter *Virginia* on August 13, 1791, and served as an officer on Norfolk-based cutters, such as *Thomas Jefferson*, through the War of 1812. Little is known about his later career.

Vigilant, Newport, Rhode Island (Master John Cahoone)

Cutter: On April 13, 1812, shipbuilder Benjamin Marble of Newport signed a contract to build, equip, furnish and finish the revenue cutter *Vigilant*. On August 21, 1812, the Newport customs collector paid Marble \$8,500.00 for completing the new cutter. The cutter measured sixty feet in length; had a nearly nineteen-foot beam; and drew ten feet. It displaced sixty-five tons; had a coppered bottom; and carried seventeen crewmembers. This cutter was the third named “*Vigilant*” and it remained in service until May 13, 1842, when it was decommissioned and sold.

Master: On January 25, 1812, John Cahoone received a commission as master in the State of Rhode Island. Cahoone commanded cutters based in Newport through February 25, 1830, and died on October 1, 1836.

Great Lakes: Revenue cutters and boats were stationed at important ports within the Great Lakes, such as Detroit and Rochester, New York. Determining their names and masters requires further study.

[Note: Within months of the war's conclusion, the Treasury Department orders several new cutters to replace those lost and worn out during the war. The new cutters included *Active* (New York), *Dallas* (Savannah), *Detector* (Portland, Maine), *Eagle* (New Haven), *Gallatin* (Charleston), *Search* (Boston) and *Surprise* (Norfolk).]

